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ABSTRACT

An inservice teacher education learning module is described which focuses on skill building in organizing independent learning in intermediate level classrooms. Content of the minicourse emphasizes acquiring information and practicing skills of helping pupils understand independent work, solve problems, and accept delayed teacher response, and of combining independent activity and small-group instruction on a permanent basis. Information is provided about course purposes, content, activities, resources, and history of development. A critique and ordering information are also included. (DS)

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DESCRIPTION OF TEACHER IN-SERVICE EDUCATION MATERIALS

A. SUMMARY INFORMATION

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
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Title: ORGANIZING INDEPENDENT LEARNING: INTERMEDIATE LEVEL (Minicourse 15)

Publication Date(s): 1973

Intended Users: Teachers seeking information on developing an independent learning environment

Grade Level(s): 4-8 (for K-3 see also Minicourse 8)

Number: Maximum of ten (in one school) per videotape recorder

Primary Focus: Skill building in utilizing independent learning in intermediate level classrooms is the main focus of the product.

School subject(s) and/or in-service topic(s) covered: The product develops teacher skill in introducing and implementing independent learning activities. No limitations on subject matter applicability are specified; illustrative material is drawn from science, social science, mathematics, language arts, and art. In-service content emphasizes acquiring information about and practicing skills for developing student understanding of independent learning, assessing levels of independence, developing independent learning contracts, and organizing the classroom for independent study.

What participant does in using the materials:
Throughout the course, teachers read about the teaching skills, view films that explain and illustrate the skills, practice their use, and evaluate their own progress in acquiring the skills. Practice of the teaching skills is accomplished through microteaching in which the teacher videotapes a brief lesson taught to a small number of students, and then through reteaching the same lesson with an entire class.

Resources: Described as "self-instructional," the course requires no instructor; a coordinator is recommended to facilitate operation. Depending on the number of participants in a given school, the course requires 5 or 6 weeks with activities 4 to 5 days a week. Each week's work requires 2 to 4 hours of in-school time and an equal amount of out-of-school time. Each teacher needs at least 9 hours of released time for microteaching and a 20-minute reel of videotape. Required at each school are one videotape system per 10 teachers; a small room for microteaching; and one 16mm sound film projector.

Describer critique:
The self-instructional and self-evaluative character of the materials may make this course particularly attractive to many teachers. While most easily used by a small group of teachers in a single school, it could be employed on a larger scale with adequate coordination and equipment.

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B. IN-DEPTH INFORMATION

Title: ORGANIZING INDEPENDENT LEARNING: INTERMEDIATE LEVEL (Minicourse 15)

Publication Date(s): 1973

Intended Users: Teachers seeking information on developing an independent learning environment

Grade Level(s): 4-8 (for K-3, see also Minicourse 8

Number: Maximum of ten (in one school) per videotape recorder

Primary Focus: Skill building in utilizing independent learning in intermediate level classrooms is the main focus.

1.0 PURPOSES:

The Coordinator's Handbook states: "A substantial body of educational research supports the value of independent study and learning. The type of instructional setting provided by independent study has been found to stimulate in the student a more positive attitude toward learning and a motivation to undertake more learning tasks. Moreover, independent study offers a workable approach to accommodating individual differences among learners by differentiating instructional methods, materials, and time for learning. Successful operation of a program of independent study requires a set of specific teaching skills. The teacher must be able to introduce students to the concept of independent learning, assess their levels of independence, and specify and organize learning activities such that students will be able to learn effectively and the teacher will be able to monitor learning efficiently."

The overall course objective is stated as "to develop teacher skills in the introduction, implementation, and utilization of independent learning activities for students at the intermediate level."

In support of this general objective, each of five instructional sequences has as its expected outcome teacher development of a series of skills: (1) skill in assessing student knowledge of the meaning of independent learning and in assessing student levels of independence; (2) skill in specifying learning objectives for independent study contracts; (3) skill in identifying resources, outlining learning steps, and setting deadlines; (4) skill in the use of reinforcers; and (5) skill in introducing independent learning activities into the classroom.

2.0 CONTENT — Scope and Sequencing of Topics:

Participants are expected to acquire specific teaching skills as follows:

Sequence I (assessing student readiness for independent learning) 1. Assess student understanding of the concept of independent learning. 2. Assess student levels of independence.

Sequence II (specifying learning objectives) 1. Specify what is to be learned. 2. Specify how learning will be demonstrated.

Sequence III (determining resources, tasks, deadlines) 1. Identify the resources the student will use to complete his contract. 2. Outline in exact terms the major steps or tasks that are to be completed in order to achieve the designated objectives. 3. Establish deadlines for completing the contract as a whole and (depending on size of the contract) for major tasks included in the contract.

Sequence IV (providing reinforcements) 1. Establish checkpoints. 2. Describe anticipated activities.

Sequence V (introducing independent learning) 1. Determine procedures to be followed in operating an independent learning program. 2. Introduce students to independent learning contracts. 3. Develop student skill in solving problems that occur when working independently. 4. Build student expertise in the use of learning skills that apply to a wide variety of independent learning situations.

The seven accompanying films restate each of the teaching skills discussed in the Teachers Handbook and illustrate their application through footage of actual teacher-pupil development of learning contracts in a number of subject areas.

Course materials are intended to be used in the established sequence and in their entirety . The Coordinators Handbook states: "Minicourses are designed to provide a complete in-service training experience. Our research indicates that Minicourse 15 is effective when all the course materials are used, following the recommended procedures. We have no evidence that components of the course are effective when used separately. For example, occasionally a teacher will feel that he can acquire the course skills just by viewing the films. We have no evidence that would substantiate this claim." Variation is encouraged in the content of the microteach lessons taught as part of the course; the sample lessons are intended to be illustrative only.

3.0 ACTIVITIES AND RESOURCES INVOLVED IN USE OF PRODUCT

3.1 Description of main in-service activities:

With slight variations among the instructional sequences, course activities for each sequence follow a pattern of reading about a set of skills in the Teachers Handbook, viewing a related film, planning and conducting videotaped microteach lessons in which the skills are applied, self-evaluating the videotaped lesson applying the skills a second time. Except for group viewing of films, participants complete these activities individually and independently, using students from their own classrooms for the practice lessons. A limited number of students from each participant's class undertake learning contracts during the period of the course.

3.2 Help given in use of product:

The Teachers Handbook (167 pp. printed, soft cover) provides a sequential list of the activities participants are to complete and gives detailed instructions for planning lessons and self-evaluating skill acquisition. Each participant requires one. The Coordinators Handbook (52 pp. printed, soft cover) contains very detailed instructions to assist with course operations: e.g. agendas for conducting introductory meetings, procedures for training teachers in use of the videotape recorder, a diagram for setting up the microteaching room, and sample daily calendars. Requirement is one per coordinator or site. There are seven 16mm color/sound films: an introductory film, four instructional films, and two model lesson films (10 minutes running time each).

4.0 EVALUATION OF TEACHER INSERVICE LEARNING

Evaluation and assessment is built into each instructional sequence and is conducted individually and privately. Teachers replay the videotapes of their lessons and complete "Teacher Self-Evaluation Forms," directing attention to the quality of their use of the teaching skills. The producers emphasize that the videotapes and self-evaluation forms are for individual guidance in assessing progress and planning subsequent lessons. They recommend that teachers be free to erase their videotapes and that no coordinator, supervisor, etc., have access to self-evaluative data.

5.0 ORDERING INFORMATION

5.1 Resources required/recommended:

This is to be used with a videotape recording system – one in each school with participants and for a maximum of ten teachers. A room at least 12' x 14' must be set aside for microteaching in each school. Every participant requires a 20-minute reel of videotape and 9 one-hour periods of released time, spread over the course, for microtreaching. Other requirements are a 16mm sound film projector and a person to serve as coordinator.

An audiotape recorder is an alternative to the VTR. The producers state they have found that videotape and audiotape feedback are of about equal effectiveness and that, therefore, "if you do not have videorecorders available, you may substitute audiorecorders without lessening the effectiveness of Minicourse 15."

5.2 Distributor name/address:

Macmillan Publishing Company
866 Third Avenue
New York, New York 10022
Phone: 212/ 935-2000

5.3 Components/approximate costs:

Component	Purchase	Rental	No. Req.	Reusable
ORGANIZING INDEPENDENT LEARNING: INTERMEDIATE LEVEL (Minicourse 15)	Total: $1149.50	--	See below	
Teachers Handbook	$4.50	--	1/participant	No*
Coordinators Handbook	$4.50	--	1/site	Yes
Seven 16mm color/sound films	$1140.00	$165.00	1/site	Yes

*The bulk of the Teachers Handbook is reusable; however, the lesson plan forms, learning checkpoints, and self-evaluation forms are consumable. Purchase of additional copies of the Teachers Handbook for follow-up applications would not be necessary if these materials were duplicated for use by each teacher.

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6.0 HISTORY OF DEVELOPMENT

6.1 Identification of the developer:

Written by Beatrice A. Ward of the Teacher Education Program at the Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development. (Dr. Ward is currently Deputy Laboratory Director.) The Minicourse teacher training format was developed at the Laboratory under the leadership of Walter R. Borg, original director of the Teacher Education Program, and was adapted from the microteach approach developed at Stanford University. Ned Flanders (then director of the Teacher Education Division) and Walter F. Stenning also contributed to the development of Minicourse 15.

6.2 How developed and when:

Testing involved over 200 teachers in the school districts of Fremont, Fresno, and Mill Valley, California and of Montgomery County, Maryland. The "Preface" to the Teachers Handbook states that the results of this testing "indicate that the course is effective. Teachers do acquire contracting skills.

6.3 Evidence of effectiveness with users:

To determine whether they continued to use the skills, teachers were interviewed two years after completion of the main field test. One hundred per cent of the teachers indicated they were still using some form of independent contracting. The pattern of use ranged from conversion of the entire instructional program to a Minicourse 15 design to development of contracts in one or two subject matter areas. Over ninety per cent of the teachers stated that independent contracting was becoming a more important part of their instructional program each year.

C. DESCRIBER CRITIQUE

Appropriateness / adaptability / technical quality:

Some teachers might react negatively to the highly detailed and occasionally repetitive learning procedures prescribed in the course materials. However, it was the producer's intent that the course help teachers to use and not just learn the skills.

The minicourse format permits little flexibility on content or delivery. It is designed as a "self-contained training package" and is intended for use with minimum modification. Users should note the limitation of a maximum of ten participants from a given school per VTR system and microteaching room.

The Teachers Handbook is professionally produced and technically correct, but is not aesthetic. There is a need for consumable materials to be available separately, in a reproduceable, looseleaf form.

Content accuracy/social fairness/community acceptance issues:

No disturbing biases are evident. However, the films do suggest use of and dependence upon many different resources which some schools would have to rent or secure for the training sessions.

It should be taken into consideration that this course deals with "individualized instruction" and some communities do not accept this style of teaching.

Overall summary/comment:

The course is limited to the use of independent learning contracts as a mechanism for "organizing independent learning" at the intermediate level. Given this construction, it appears to be a highly transportable and useful inservice training package to help teachers acquire the specific skills associated with instituting independent learning activities in their classrooms.

One important aspect of management that was not covered is deciding upon a method of keeping track of the group as a whole. The reviewer feels that some suggestions for record keeping that would help the teacher to view the progress of the whole group at a glance would have been helpful.

D. USER CRITIQUE

User(s): Two teachers, fourth grade and fourth/fifth combination, ages and years of teaching experience not known. Work primarily with middle class students. Educational points-of-view not known. *Note:* These teachers reviewed the material at the request of Project ARIE (at the Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development).

Summary of critique:

OBJECTIVE: Reviewers found objectives well stated and easy to follow: "helped to make specific objectives more understandable."

CONTENT: In terms of the *scope of the content*, one reviewer found it was sufficient to meet the purposes of the product, while the other reviewer felt that help in working out total class management, record keeping suggestions and evaluation suggestions would have further enhanced the product. They both agreed the materials reflected current knowledge. In regard to the *sequence of content*, the reviewers stated, "The sequence seems to help and I especially liked the follow up of book work with videotape lessons," and "The text had to be read thoroughly in order to group completely the skills taught."

DELIVERY: The reviewers stated "Films - speech slightly garbled. Couldn't understant some of the children." "Text made it very clear how to go about procedures." While one reviewer felt the text was specific enough for an individual to use the course without a resource person or fellow teacher, the other felt the need for such leadership to schedule, help critique evaluation points and in general further enhance the materials. Both reviewers stated the activities involved followed closely the way in which they like to learn; although as one stated, "I like everything step by step. But this program could get quite boring if one were not very motivated."

ASSESSMENT: The reviewers used the self-check quizzes within the chapters to see if they were understanding the content and felt satisfied there was a good match between assessment means and purpose of the product.

OVERALL COMMENT: Only one of the reviewers gave her overall comment. She stated she learned much more than she had expected to,given the limited time of the review, and was more interested at the climax of the review than at the onset of the critique. As far as recommending the product to those who had similar needs, she stated "this could possibly be a good skill to acquire for a teacher of a combination class where the subject matters are different." She did state that she felt bogged down with too much detail and complicated terms.

SPECIAL NOTE: The above critique was done by reviewing the materials – not as a result of actual use and this evaluation should be considered with that in mind.